

ED 374 121

SP 035 471

AUTHOR Sudzina, Mary R.; Kilbane, Clare Ryan  
 TITLE New Contexts for Educational Case Study Applications: From Classroom to Competition and Beyond.  
 PUB DATE Jun 94  
 NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the World Association for Case Method Research and Application (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, June 19-22, 1994). For a related document, see SP 035 474.  
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Case Studies; \*Competition; \*Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Schools of Education; Teacher Education Curriculum; \*Team Training; \*Theory Practice Relationship  
 IDENTIFIERS Case Method (Teaching Technique); \*Event Analysis; \*Preservice Teachers; University of Virginia

## ABSTRACT

Case-based teaching as a strategy to effectively weave theory, practice, and problem-solving into the preservice teacher education curriculum is gaining momentum in the preparation of future teachers. Teacher educators have discovered that the case study method provides a valuable link to the "real world" of teaching as well as opportunities beyond field placement experiences for preservice teachers to reflect on and critically analyze teaching incidents and to develop schema appropriate to future classroom practice. This paper presents an example of how case-based teaching was used to prepare a team of five undergraduate preservice teachers for the Second Commonwealth Center Invitational Team Case Competition held at the University of Virginia in 1993. The use of cases in this "new context" extended the method's benefits beyond the university curriculum in unexpected ways. As the preservice teachers practiced their problem-solving skills, they also learned to research, network, and collaborate to compete. These experiences resulted in a sense of personal and professional empowerment among team members, inspiring them to establish a similar competition at their home institution and to present their findings through presentations and symposia. (Contains 14 references.) (LL)

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# NEW CONTEXTS FOR EDUCATIONAL CASE STUDY APPLICATIONS: FROM CLASSROOM TO COMPETITION AND BEYOND

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the  
World Association for Case Method Research & Application  
June 19-22, 1994  
Montreal, Canada

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## NEW CONTEXTS FOR EDUCATIONAL CASE STUDY APPLICATIONS: FROM CLASSROOM TO COMPETITION AND BEYOND

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### Abstract

This paper presents an example of how case-based teaching was used to prepare a team of five undergraduate preservice teachers for a national case study competition. The use of cases in this "new context" extended the method's benefits beyond the university curriculum in unexpected ways. As these preservice teachers practiced their problem-solving skills, they also learned to research, network and collaborate to compete. These experiences resulted in a sense of personal and professional empowerment among team members and inspired them to establish a similar competition at their home institution, and to present their findings through presentations and symposia.

### INTRODUCTION

The use of the case study method is gaining momentum in the United States in the preparation of preservice teachers [White & McNergney, 1991]. Teacher educators have discovered that the case study method provides a valuable link to the "real world" of teaching, and well as opportunities beyond field placement experiences for preservice teachers to carefully reflect and critically analyze teaching incidents and to develop schemas appropriate for future classroom practice [Henson, 1988]. During the last several years, the number of case study texts for education published in the United States has increased dramatically, reflecting a growing interest in applying cases to teacher preparation and in university case study text adoptions. One of the early texts was Greenwood and Parkay's Case Studies for Teacher Decision Making [1989], followed by others including Russo's Confronting Educational Issues: Decision Making with Case Studies [1990], Kowalski, Henson and Weaver's Case Studies on Teaching [1990], Silverman, Welty and Lyon's Case Studies for Teacher Problem Solving [1992], Shulman's Case Methods in Teacher Education [1992], and Kauffman, Mosert, Nuttycomb, Trent and Hallahan's Managing Classroom Behavior: A Reflective Case-Based Approach [1993]. The integration of case study texts into the teacher education curriculum offers multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to connect theory and practice while at the same time promoting the development of problem-solving, networking, and research skills [Sudzina and Kilbane, 1992]. Cases can also be used to focus on specific issues in teaching such as multicultural and diversity issues [Sudzina, 1993].

One result of the growing interest in case-based pedagogy, application, research and texts has been the establishment of a national team case competition sponsored, in part, by the Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Commonwealth Center for the Education of Teachers at the University of Virginia, and the National Education Association. The competition, inaugurated in 1992 with the financial support of Allyn & Bacon Publishers, has attracted attention as the first event of its kind in the field of teacher education. This paper chronicles the transition and adjustments a teacher educator and a group of preservice teachers made from the application of the case study method in their university classrooms, to their preparation for participation in a national team case competition, to the impact of this experience on their subsequent personal and professional activities. Dr. Sudzina, the first author of this paper, was the competition team faculty advisor; Claire Ryan Kilbane, the second author and currently an elementary teacher, was the preservice teacher team captain.

### **THE COMPETITION**

Teams of prospective teachers from across the United States and Canada were encouraged to submit a proposal to the Second Commonwealth Center Invitational Team Case Competition, held at the University of Virginia, early in 1993. The competition, scheduled for four days in May, was billed as "an event designed to test teachers' abilities to defend their ideas about teaching and learning before an eminent board of judges from various disciplines and a gallery of interested observers" [Ford, 1993]. Teams were encouraged to be diverse in the areas of age, gender, racial composition, ethnic make-up, subject-matter specialties and professionally relevant experiences. They were also asked to communicate the extent to which case based teaching was used at their institution.

During the first day of the competition, the four invited teams (The University of Calgary, The University of Dayton, The University of Hawaii, and The University of Vermont) and the defending champions (Hampton University) traveled to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, visited with the other participants and met the competition organizers and student assistants. The second day, each team received instructions, was assigned a computer and work space, and given the written case. The case was selected from a text, then in press, whose co-authors included several teacher educators from the host institution [see, Kauffman et. al., 1993]. Teams were allowed six hours to research, diagnose, and prepare a written analysis of no more than five typed pages. The following day, each team received forty-five minutes to orally present their analysis to the judges. This presentation consisted of a ten minute overview from the team captain and the remainder of the time was to be spent responding to questions posed by three provocateurs. The winner was announced that evening at a banquet in the Dome room of the University of Virginia's landmark Rotunda building. On the next and final morning, a session was held for the purpose of sharing information about each school's teacher education program as well as reflecting and offering feedback regarding the competition experience.

### **PRELIMINARY PREPARATION: THE ROAD TO VIRGINIA**

Both authors were interested in the case study method as a result of conducting research together examining case-based pedagogy from the points of view of a professor and preservice teacher [Sudzina and Kilbane, 1992]. When the announcement for the Second Invitational Team Case Competition arrived, the authors went about the task of selecting a team with the intention of attending the competition, and doing their best to win.

### Comprising the Team: Selecting for Personal Qualities and Diversity

The procedure for team selection corresponded to the Commonwealth Center selection criteria in the call for proposals. Personal qualities of candidates were also considered in terms of writing, research and presentation skills, problem-solving, leadership, and collaboration abilities. Additionally, candidates were sought who were interested in competing, intrinsically motivated, compassionate, goal-oriented and diligent. The final team was composed of four females and one male, which included four Caucasians and one African-American. The "developmental design" resulted in selecting one senior who had completed student teaching, two juniors who were enrolled in methods courses and two sophomores who were currently completing their educational psychology requirements. Team members were currently enrolled or had completed Dr. Sudzina's case-based *Teaching and Learning* class.

### Case-Use Survey

To meet the request for information concerning case-based teaching at their institution, the team wrote and administered a survey within the Department of Teacher Education. The data and responses received from the various professors in the department affirmed previous notions of the wide-spread use of cases at every stage in the program. What was surprising was the variety of case resources and implementation in these courses. For example, some professors were using novels and film as cases, and writing their own cases in addition to using case texts. Students were also writing cases about their field experiences dilemmas in an effort to communicate and problem-solve classroom observation issues.

Additional information about the use of cases across the university was acquired from the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. This interview found that case implementation workshops were provided for university faculty each academic year. Cases were a large component of instruction in business, law, psychology, and engineering in addition to education. This information expanded team perspectives about the use of the case study method and reinforced the importance of their participation in the upcoming competition.

### Writing the Proposal

This was a "first" professional writing experience for four out of five of the team members. The preparation of this document was the team's first cooperative effort, and one that set the stage for future collaboration. Each member of the team took responsibility for a certain part of the proposal's production. Team members who had a talent for writing compiled the team's biographies and did most of the writing in the document. Team photos were taken and included in the proposal. Those who were proficient at using the computer entered data and generated the graphics and flow charts which made the completed work look truly professional. Others organized and compiled the required ten copies.

The final document surpassed everyone's expectations. It was ten pages, bound, and included two color team photographs. The result of this collaboration was a proposal in which everyone took pride and, subsequently, earned the team an invitation to the competition. This was a visible sign that five very diverse students who hadn't known each other previously could work together with a similar goal in mind.

## **DEVELOPING THE SKILLS TO COMPETE**

The prospect of a *team* case competition was particularly intriguing as it offered an unusual opportunity for preservice teachers, who were used to competing exceptionally well individually, to preview an unknown situation together and collaboratively find the best solutions(s). Many skills needed to be developed for successful team collaboration, skills that



are often not acquired in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. Collaboration was key because those who could pool their knowledge and resources to arrive at well-thought out and well-rounded solutions would be successful competitors, and, ultimately, teachers.

### Team Building

Team building played an important, if not essential role in the preparation process. Before the team could work together however, there had to be a certain amount of familiarity, camaraderie, and trust developed. The construction of the initial proposal did a great deal to achieve this. But it was still apparent that the team was made up of five students who had achieved on their own but now needed to learn to work together for success. "Working dinners" were held weekly at the university that combined social and professional knowledge as each member shared their career aspirations, family background and areas of expertise. Team members presented at a symposium together at the university [see, Sudzina, Ahlgren, Belanich, Damon, Kilbane, Miller & Young, 1993] and continued to define and refine their roles within the team. They sat in on some classes together using case study analyses and kept each other up to date on what needed to be done. They audiotaped problem solving sessions to learn to listen and acknowledge others' contributions. They brunchted together and analyzed videotapes of the previous year's competition. Although this was a difficult process, individuals struggled to put personal differences aside to attain synergy so that the team as a whole would be stronger than any single individual.

### Case Analysis and Problem-Solving

While each of the team members had experienced the use of cases before, their experiences were different in many respects. Although several had shared required courses in which cases were used, they found that they each had specific schemas with which they thought about cases. Content knowledge as well as personal and professional experiences provided a wealth of information but the team needed to make this information collective. Before the team could develop a strategy for team preparation, it was important to assess the team's current facility with the method. To discover this, the team took a sample case study, sent by the Commonwealth Center with the call for proposals, and worked to analyze it. (This was the same case which was used in the first competition that took place a year earlier.) Each team member read the case and met together to analyze it as a group. The team leader facilitated the discussion and an audio recording was made of the entire session. From this experience, the team not only developed a knowledge for each other's problem-solving styles, they also acquired important information about where they were and where we had to go. With an audio cassette to review with an unbiased perspective, the team captain and faculty advisor were able to listen for "blind spots" in the team's analysis, identify each team member's problem-solving style and diagnose the team's ability to collaborate. During the next eight weeks, the team's preparation focused on developing teamwork, collaboration and presentation strategies. Additionally, team members meet once a week to discuss cases with an Honors/Scholars section of educational psychology whose focus was case analysis, application, and research.

### Research and Content Area Knowledge

In addition to the team's efforts to promote collaboration, critical thinking and a multi-perspective analysis, the team also had to develop a facility for applying content specific knowledge to cases. They also had to learn to back up "gut feelings" with grounding in professional literature. The faculty advisor modeled these strategies and mentored the team as they practiced distinguishing between responses based on generalizations and those based on theoretical applications and research. Adding credibility to opinions and analyses was an

important and powerful professional lesson. The team began to review the knowledge which they had obtained through various courses in teacher training and discern which theories would be the most useful in case analysis. This prioritizing and selection was, they realized, a higher order thinking skill. It was quite a discovery when team members realized that they each favored different psychological theories. They also realized that each had "favorite" educational trends and researchers.

Team members began to think about their own thinking as well. In addition to a review of previously learned information, they also practiced finding additional information to assist in their problem-solving efforts. Each team member practiced conducting ERIC searches on different educational issues including multiculturalism, inclusion, journaling, education of the gifted, and urban teaching. This skill was a new acquisition for over half of the team members who had never before been challenged to use computer information indexes, and to apply that information to specific situations.

### Strengthening Presentation and Writing Skills

Even the best ideas can be diminished unless they are clearly presented in verbal and/or written form. Through team discussion, it became apparent that the quality of the analysis would suffer if it could not be effectively communicated. Developing a strategy for writing a collaborative document and refining presentation skills became the team's next challenge. Together, the team began to formulate how the paper would be written. In addition, the faculty advisor modeled techniques of professional writing including the use of APA style for documentation, a form that had not been emphasized in the teacher education program. At this point, the team also began to determine a strategy for the oral defense. Through practice, the team began to develop a "feel" for each other's areas of expertise. Team members became comfortable with giving way and conceding to each others responses. They also began to support one another by adding additional information to responses on a case. It became understood that if one member was best at fielding questions regarding, for example, exceptional students, the others would allow them first crack at it. In essence, the team developed a non-verbal understanding with each other or a "sixth sense."

In addition to planning the strategy for the actual competition, the team also engaged in activities which would enable them to develop these skills. Collaboratively, the team produced a poster display for a university symposia which celebrated undergraduate research and special projects. Members of the teams took turns staffing the presentation and answering questions from observers. This provided additional practice in communicating about the competition in a professional setting [see, Sudzina, et. al., 1993].

### Mock Simulation - Putting It All Together

In an attempt to prepare as much as possible for the actual competition and to further build team confidence, a mock simulation of the competition was set up. The team met in the library for six hours one Sunday. Using a case selected by the faculty advisor, they discussed, researched and prepared a five-paged typed analysis according to competition guidelines. On Tuesday, they presented their findings to the Honors/Scholars class, who had also read the same case.. To further replicate the competition format, the team leader gave a ten minute case overview and the remainder of the time was spent answering questions from the provocateurs (the Honors/Scholars students). This simulation resulted in increased team confidence. It also revealed areas for further improvement.

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## THE COMPETITION EXPERIENCE

The team looked forward to the competition with certain expectations which were not only met, but surpassed. Team members expected to learn about different teacher education programs, meet other preservice teachers, practice problem-solving and analytical skills, and have fun. They didn't expect the unsolicited affirmation they received regarding their personal and professional abilities from judges and other teacher educators, an experience which broadened their perspectives and actions regarding future professional goals and opportunities.

### DEVELOPING TEAM IDENTITY AND VISIBILITY

Upon arrival at the competition, the University of Dayton team became known as the "Green Team." This name, a result of the forest green UD tee-shirts donned by the team members, developed both team visibility and increased morale. It gave the individual team members a sense of unity and identity regarding their common goals and the university philosophy of "Learn, Lead, Serve." As the team learned about the programs of other universities, they felt reaffirmed about their own preservice preparation and experiences.

### SOLVING THE CASE

#### Analyzing the Problem

The case was set in an upper-middle class suburban setting and dealt with the behaviors and attitudes of gifted/high achieving students whose beloved teacher had left. In addition, it addressed the experiences of a novice teacher who needed to develop a relationship with this class of students. The team's mock simulation made it possible for them to get immediately to work on the case. The team read the case, discussed it on an audio recording, and then made a list of research to be gathered. They brainstormed on chart paper which was then hung on the walls of the work space. While three members of the team went to conduct research in the education library, the remaining team members began to write the paper. The remainder of the afternoon was spent refining and revising the document to meet the 5 p.m. deadline.

#### The Oral Defense

The team reconvened in their advisor's room early in the evening and worked through the early morning hours to practice their oral defense skills and the team leader's opening statement. They were cross-examined on their written statements, research, conclusions and consequences of the case. Additional research was discussed, areas of expertise affirmed, and team etiquette reviewed.

Teams drew lots for the order of their oral defense and Dayton was slated to go on second out of the five teams. The three provocateurs' questions were challenging and required higher-order thinking skills in addition to a working knowledge of theory and practice. Questions were specific to each team's written analysis. Advisors were permitted to attend each defense; team members were restricted to their own presentation. Each team's defense was videotaped.

### OUTCOMES

The winning team, The University of Calgary, was announced after dinner that evening. Team advisors, who had seen all the presentations, concurred that the mature graduate Calgary team gave a masterful and creative presentation and defense. Although the young UD team was disappointed with the outcome, they received many complimentary and supportive comments by



judges and observers after the banquet, an unexpected outcome..

On the flight home from the competition, the team had the chance to reflect on how much they had learned and how far they had come together in order to compete at Virginia. They agreed that this event was one of the highlights of their teacher preparation career. Individual team members expressed an interest in hosting a regional team case competition to offer other preservice teachers a taste of their overwhelmingly positive experiences. Their advisor then suggested submitting a panel proposal to national conference to report about these experiences. Departing from the plane for summer break, they all agreed to meet in early fall for further discussion.

## **BEYOND THE COMPETITION**

While the immediate results of the case competition are known, the long-term effects of this experience on individual participants are still being realized. The use of cases in this new preservice context served as a catalyst for further case-based activities, preservice leadership skills, research and scholarship, and concrete applications to a novice teacher classroom.

## **FEEDBACK AND DEBRIEFING**

Some of the best indicators of the effectiveness of this instance of case application happened *after* the competition. The judges' feedback received several weeks later served as a springboard for further reflections on the competition and motivated the team to continue to work together. Team members would probably not have thought about the competition, and communicated with each other over the summer, if not for the written comments from the judges, distributed by their faculty advisor. The time lapse enabled the team to view the judges' comments, as well as the video tape of their performance and that of the winning team, with the kind of objectivity they had learned to use in case analysis. Feedback in written and video form served as an important tool in the learning process as it reinforced individual and team strengths and suggested areas for personal and professional improvement. The team was continuing to learn from their competition experience as they shared with each other impressions, insights and recommendations for future case applications and activities.

## **PANEL PRESENTATION**

Motivated by the positive written and verbal feedback they received, and their own sense of professional empowerment in "surviving and thriving" at the competition, the team collaborated with their faculty advisor to present a panel discussion at a national curriculum conference [see, Sudzina, Ahlgren, Damon, Miller and Young, 1993] in the fall. Team members discussed case preparation, the competition itself, and how that experience changed and expanded the way they viewed their roles as future teachers, professionals, researchers, and educational leaders. Turning their experiences into a case, they provided conference participants with a rationale and ideas for implementing case studies into the teacher education curriculum. Additionally, they showed a video clip from the competition, and prepared a case for the audience participation. For all of the participants, this was their first conference presentation and a natural extension of their competition preparation: organizing, collaborating, writing, presenting, and answering questions. The session went very well. For further individual feedback, the presentations were also audiotaped. This conference experience seemed to further whet the preservice teachers' appetites to host a case competition at their home institution.

## MINI CASE COMPETITION

The team sought and gained the support of the Dean of the School of Education to sponsor a mini case competition second semester. Invitations were sent out to over 50 regional university and college teacher preparation institutions. Fourteen schools responded and four schools were invited to the one day competition. Team members took charge of all the details from selecting the case and formulating judging criteria, to planning the banquet and reserving meeting rooms. Faculty judges, invited by team members, represented six academic disciplines. Their former team captain, a first year teacher, was also invited back to judge.

The mini competition, a "condensed" version of the Commonwealth Center competition, took place on the last Friday in February. Competing teams were given the same case to solve from Managing Classroom Behavior: A Reflective Case-based Approach (Kauffman et. al., 1993), and asked to prepare a specific outline for the judges to follow. Participating faculty team advisors were offered a case study workshop in the morning hosted by the case competition team to share ideas about case-based teaching from faculty and student perspectives. In the afternoon, teams were individually questioned by two provocateurs, School of Education faculty, while the judges observed and ranked overall team responses. A reception and banquet were held that evening and prizes awarded. The event was videotaped and copies sent to participants along with judges' comments. Several of the competing teams expressed an interest in hosting the competition next year and it is expected that it will become an annual regional event.

## RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

As a result of their involvement case-based teaching, (the national case competition, the mini competition, the Stander Symposium for Undergraduate Research, a national curriculum conference panel presentation, a case workshop for faculty, and written research associated with case-based teaching), four of the five team members have been recognized for their outstanding achievements in the 12 months since the competition. The national case competition team leader, a co-author of this paper, won the prestigious Dean's Research Award at graduation and was listed in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. The two junior team members also won this award upon their recent graduation. One of the sophomore team members, now a junior, was recently elected to Who's Who, and has won a summer fellowship to a national program at Phillips Exeter Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. The other sophomore team member, also a junior, has assumed leadership of a new team participating in a virtual team case competition, the first international e-mail preservice case competition, hosted by the Commonwealth Center at the University of Virginia. All attribute their case competition experience as a major influence in their continued scholarly and leadership activities.

## IMPACT ON A NOVICE TEACHER

The skills developed to analyze cases, collaborate, motivate team members, and present findings to both judges and provocateurs have contributed to the success of the team captain in her first year of teaching, particularly in regard to classroom management and school socialization. As a fourth grade teacher, she used the objectivity gained through case analysis daily. In many instances, she was able to remove herself from "touchy" situations and make use of broader perspectives to view classroom occurrences as a third person observer. This objectivity removed her from highly emotional issues and allowed for more logical, reflective decisions. She also found herself identifying problem situations and applying educational theory

and practice to them rather than just going with her gut instinct. Additionally, she used her research skills to search the literature about difficult problems and issues.

Collaboration with fellow teachers and auxiliary staff is often a challenge for first year teachers. The collaborative nature of the case competition fostered the development of this novice teacher's cooperative skills with the school psychologist, nurse, reading specialist, parents and fellow teachers. The ability to acknowledge each person's expertise and put personal differences aside to focus on the best interests of the child was learned through the team's case competition preparation. Equally, the motivational and facilitating skills used as team captain have helped to "get the ball rolling" on professional committees.

Finally, the professional skills necessary for presenting and defending the team's analysis before an audience of eminent educators has played an integral role in entry year teaching confidence and communication. The articulate and comfortable presentation style developed for the oral defense has been helpful during parent-teacher conferences, open house, school board meetings, and daily classroom instruction. The practice defending her professional judgement in front of the provocateurs has paid off every time she explained her judgements to her students' parents. The social networking skills used at the competition have assisted this first year teacher in setting up effective lines of home-school communication and fostering strong parent support for her innovative teaching practices. "In short," she says, "my first year teaching has been made easier in many ways by my participation in the competition."

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Case-based teaching as a strategy to effectively weave theory, practice, and problem-solving in preservice teacher education has attracted the interest of teacher educators, researchers, professional education associations, and publishers alike. A result of this mutual interest has been the sponsorship of a national invitational team case competition for preservice teachers. Preparing and participating in the Commonwealth Center's Second Invitational Team Case Competition served as a catalyst for a team of undergraduate preservice teachers to reflect on their personal and professional roles and goals as future educators.

Team members collaboratively developed skills of: leadership, cooperation, problem-solving, networking, writing, researching, and oral presentation. The utilization of cases in this fashion inspired these future educators to extend this learning beyond the university classroom, to professional competitions and conferences, and into an elementary classroom. Team members felt enriched and empowered from these experiences. Several team members have assumed leadership roles within the university and community, and have expressed the desire to continue to write, research, and present collaboratively. It appears that the competitive aspect of case analysis served to encourage, rather than discourage, a sense of professionalism, camaraderie and desire for excellence from these preservice teachers. Even though this team came home from the competition "empty handed," they came home far from "empty headed." The case competition experience provided a springboard to new contexts for educational case study applications for these future educators, and their faculty advisor.

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